

# E-Leadership or “How to Be Boss in Instant Messaging?” The Role of Nonverbal Communication

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## Abstract

Doing leadership in the virtual realm has now become a routine part of many leaders' daily work, yet our understanding of how leadership is enacted in mediated contexts—especially in text-only channels—is very limited. By applying micro-level analysis to naturally occurring instant message conversations, this article exposes the strategies leaders employ to achieve a range of complex communication goals: to get the work done while fostering informality and collegiality and creating the sense of a real—and not virtual—collaboration between team members. The findings further our understanding in two domains: They provide empirical grounding for e-leadership theories by exposing practices from real-life interactions, and they contribute to discursive leadership literature by addressing nonverbal communication practices. The findings of the article could form the basis for management and leadership training by drawing attention to the linguistic and semiotic resources digital leaders have at their disposal in virtual work environments.

## Keywords

e-leadership, virtual team leadership, computer-mediated communication, CMC cues, nonverbal communication interactional linguistics, grounded practical theory

## Introduction

The following conversation takes place in a global consultancy company, in writing, via instant messaging (IM), between two colleagues who are in geographically distant

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locations. Fabiana is Andrew's boss, the regional lead of the team. There are two levels of hierarchy between them, and in this conversation fragment, Fabiana is enquiring about who is going to take the minutes at their next meeting:

Excerpt 1 (Fabiana, Regional Lead/Asia; Andrew, Specialist/India).

1. Fabiana | 10:58 | do u know who is taking minute?
2. Andrew | 10:59 | No, normally I think Cailey herself takes the notes.
3. Fabiana | 10:59 | i dun think so... oh oh
4. Fabiana | 10:59 | Mary said she is not the one taking either
5. Andrew | 11:00 | Uhhh...in the past, whenever Cailey didn't assign responsibility explicitly to someone, she herself was doing the needful.
6. Fabiana | 11:01 | oh..ok
7. Andrew | 11:01 | I hope that applies today too
8. Fabiana | 11:01 | me too.. ha ha.. :-P

What is interesting in this conversation is Fabiana's linguistic behavior: her disregard for proper capitalization and the relaxed spelling of *dun* (line 3), her use of ellipsis marks (. . .) and "backchannel" sounds (oh) in Lines 3 and 6 as well as her laughter and "tongue-sticking-out" emoticon in Line 8.

Her communicative strategies seem to be in stark contrast with what is deemed acceptable or appropriate in business communication: A leading textbook, for example, advocates that to communicate professionally in IM people should:

- Keep their messages simple and to the point avoiding unnecessary chitchat
- Avoid jargon, slang, and abbreviations, which may be confusing and appear unprofessional
- Employ proper grammar, spelling, and proofreading as a way of showing respect toward their conversational partners (Guffey & Loewy, 2010, p. 114).

As Loglia and Bower (2016) also question, writing strategies that would help professionals convey subtle, nonverbal cues are often labelled unprofessional: "We are heavily discouraged from using these useful tactics. . . . But why?" (p. 38; see also Byron & Baldrige, 2007).

Similar questions are echoed in business communication scholarship that sets out to expose the divide between textbook theories and real-life practices (e.g., Angouri, 2010; Chan, 2009; Williams, 1988). The divide between digital communication training and real-life practice has been found to be particularly problematic: as Skovholt, Grønning, and Kankaanranta (2014) note "guidelines tend to be normative and colored by the author's personal values rather than reflecting the actual use" (p. 781; see also

Kathpalia & Ling, 2014). This article aims to contribute to the bridging of this divide by shedding light on how exactly people *do* leadership in digital, text-based environments. Specifically, the article aims to expose the role nonverbal computer-mediated cues play during the communication of leadership and management goals. By doing so, this article sets out to cultivate a better understanding of real-life communicative practices, in particular the subtle, out-of-awareness strategies that play a crucial role in leadership communication, but which are not always prominently featured in business communication curricula (e.g., Chan, 2009).

To do so in what follows, I provide a brief overview of the role of communication in leadership and management. Then, I explain why digital leadership warrants special attention and how the lack of audio and visual information affect interpersonal interactions. To understand the importance of nonverbal communication in leadership and management communication, I provide a brief overview of the scholarship in the field related to face-to-face interactions and an overview of research related to nonverbal communication in digital interactions. The next section then explains the theoretical grounding (grounded practical theory [GPT]) and the methodology used for the analysis of naturally occurring interactions (interactional linguistics). Following the micro-analysis of data, the article concludes by drawing attention to the subtle but crucial functions achieved by the use on nonverbal signaling in digital writing and a call for shift in conception regarding creative writing strategies in digital business communication.

### *Leadership (and) Communication*

The complexity of leadership communication—and the justification for the need to critically understand its role and functioning—comes from the fact that leaders use language and other semiotic resources to achieve many concurrent aims from “leader genres” like passing on visions and values, inspiring and motivating (e.g., Frese, Beimel, & Schoenborn, 2003), managing change (e.g., Lawrence, 2015), the creation and maintenance of trust in teams (Clifton, 2012), and the communication of organizational values (Holmes, 2007) to “manager genres” that have to do with the concrete everyday running of the operations and the management of work and people (Larsson & Lundholm, 2010). While the boundaries between leadership and management have long been debated and contested (see Grint, 2005); for the purpose of this work, my preposition is a closely inter-related link between the two, with soft skills—and specifically communication skills—being in the center of both. My premise combines Larsson and Lundholm’s (2010) observation that “leadership is an integral part of (or embedded in) managerial work” (p. 163) with the idea that managing is part of what leaders do when they translate leadership visions into the everyday reality of production and performance (see Norlyk, 2012).

Both leadership and management skills are closely related to communication skills in general and (critical) language skills and awareness in particular—whether it means a religious-like visionary communication when empowering people or communicating vision or values (Norlyk, 2012, p. 110), or whether it has to do with creating a supportive, productive working environment (see Schnurr, 2009b), or acknowledging and rewarding employee’s performance. As a matter of fact, the skills aforementioned, labelled “people management skills,” have been found to considerably affect the

efficiency and performance of today's organizations (Investors in People, 2015). The report of the international benchmarking agency claims that, for example, the U.K. economy could benefit by up to £77 billion in efficiency gains if the above mentioned skills and practices were more widely adopted. In spite of the proven importance of communication and language skills, however, Musson and Cohen (1999) found that the ability to acquire such skills and opportunities to develop theoretical and critical understanding, is rarely mentioned, let alone addressed in management training.

Thus, if we accept that there is a close link between effective leadership/management and communication, attention should be paid to the means of communication: language and nonverbal communication. These are key resources leaders use when they have to balance the pressures of getting the job done, the *transactional goals*, with acts that aim to maintain collegiality, to motivate, and show concern for the coworkers' needs, in other words, the *relational goals*. It is specifically the balance of these two main goals in communication which, in my interpretation, define effective leadership: a consistent communicative performance which results in acceptable outcomes for the organization (transactional/task-oriented goals) and which maintains harmony within the team or community of practice (relational/people-oriented goal; see also Holmes, 2006).

To achieve these complex, and often conflicting, interactional goals, however, leaders have to make use of a wide range of semiotic resources, both verbal and nonverbal, and in *every* encounter with subordinates, be it one-to-one or group meetings, phone calls to inspirational speeches and addresses, or online text-based interactions, like chats or e-mail.

A call to pay much greater attention to these mundane, everyday interactions has been aptly articulated by Vine, Holmes, Marra, Pfeifer, and Jackson (2008): The authors critique leadership (communication) training for giving a false impressions about the limited number of sites where leaders have to communicate as leaders. Vine et al. (2008) call for more research that focuses on everyday interactions and the actual processes by which leadership is created so that we can get a better understanding of leadership in action: How it is enacted, maintained, and negotiated through language and communication.

This article sets out to answer this call, focusing on a specific site of interpersonal interactions: IM. The reason for this focus is twofold: First, because the rapid spread of digital communication technologies, various forms of virtual collaborations have now become routine part of our working lives and therefore increasing the need for leaders who can skillfully communicate via digital channels and second, closely inter-related with the first, is because digital interactions seem to have been neglected in both the discursive leadership literature as well as in literature that informs teaching and training materials in leadership and management communication training (for an overview, see Darics, 2016).

## **Communicating Leadership Goals in the Virtual Realm**

Doing leadership in the virtual realm has now become a routine part of many leaders' daily work, whether it means leading virtual teams the members of which have never

met in person or sending e-mails to colleagues who regularly meet face-to-face. Interestingly, research shows that leading people via digital channels requires even greater effort to combine leadership and management functions: On the one level, e-leaders have to manage performance and implement solutions to work problems, at another level, and often concurrently, intertwined with the previous, they have to create and maintain a team identity by establishing a mission/vision, sharing values and goals, creating a trusting collegial working environment (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Brewer, 2015; Ejiwale, 2012; Fay & Kline, 2011; Hambley, O'Neil, & Kline, 2007). In their study on the perceptions of emergent leadership in text-only virtual collaborations, Shollen and Brunner (2016) found that socially oriented behaviors, in particular *positive interaction style* (such as showing care and respect for team members, encouraging others, and "listening to them"), were evaluated as a key features for positive influence. Kayworth and Leidner (2002) arrived to a similar conclusion about the role of communication in effective leadership. The authors attest that effective e-leaders are "those who communicated regularly, answered team member questions, provided feedback, gave directions, and approached the members with a cordial, yet assertive tone" (p. 22). What these articles offer little insight into, however, is how exactly "positive interaction style" or "positive, yet assertive tone" is achieved: How can, for example, aspiring leaders "do" listening in writing or what are the specific strategies that they use to demonstrate respect or care?

Studies concerned with discursive leadership in face-to-face interactions have previously addressed these issues: Clifton (2012), for example, scrutinized the interactional strategies people use to "do" trust, Holmes and Stubbe (2003) provided a comprehensive overview of discursive devices used to achieve relational communicative goals, especially when people in higher positions wanted to show consideration for their subordinates, and Schnurr (2009a, 2009b) examined the role of humor and teasing in relational communication. However, our understanding of how exactly leaders "do" relational work in text-based interactions or how they utilize the resources available to them in text-only contexts is limited (see also Skovholt, 2015).

The reason why text-based contexts warrant special attention is because when people communicate via textual channels such as e-mail and IM, they miss out on the auditory and visual cues. This is because the composition of the messages and the reading and interpretation of messages take place in two separate physical environments. The cues that would normally communicate the subtle relational messages and aid interaction and understanding are lacking. Not surprisingly, communication in the virtual environment in general (Ejiwale, 2012; Kayworth & Leidner, 2002) and the inability to convey nonverbal cues, in particular (Brewer, 2015; RW<sup>3</sup> Cultural Wizards, 2010; Shollen & Brunner, 2016), have been found particularly challenging in virtual collaborations.

Although organizational and management communication literature has previously made a note of the problems caused by the lack of nonverbal cues and the effect this might have on professional communication (e.g., Berry, 2011; Morgan, Paucar-Caceres, & Wright, 2014; Vroman & Kovacich, 2002), the exploration and their treatment is far from systematic. Many observations take a dismissive stance: Thompson and Coovert

(2003), for example, observe that interactional dynamics suffer during virtual work because “give-and-take is hindered by the concentrated effort required to type and relay information that is easily transmitted via nonverbal and paraverbal nuances” (p. 136). The authors point out that online collaborators may attempt to communicate such nuances via a variety of techniques, such as complex syntax and redundancy; however, “these techniques are generally regarded as low-quality, time consuming substitutes” (Thompson & Coover, 2003, p. 136). Similarly, Cornelius and Boos (2003) attest that the missing nonverbal cues in task-oriented computer-mediated interactions could only be compensated by costly verbal feedback. Others found that although some nonverbal cues (emoticons, capitalization, asterisks) are available in text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC), their purposeful use is infrequent (Byron, 2008). A review of these studies, however, reveals that their judgments related to nonverbal communication do not seem to be based on research findings addressing specifically the language and nonverbal cues use in digital contexts.

Other organizational researchers take a better notice of online language use. Nardi, Whittaker, and Bradner (2000), for example, explored the variables that have an influence on how the formality of workplace interactions is perceived in IM. Their findings confirmed that language use plays a major role in IM being perceived as an informal channel. Byron and Baldrige (2007) explored the use of two types of nonverbal cues (capitalization and emoticons) in e-mail communication, and found that these cues had a considerable effect on the impressions formed about the senders of the messages. Byron and Baldrige (2007) conclude that a “better understanding of the processes by which emotions are conveyed and perceived in e-mail messages is needed to help guide managerial attempts to ensure that the use of e-mail facilitates rather than hinders organizational communication” (p. 156).

### **“Doing Leadership” Through Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication has previously been acknowledged in leadership communication and discursive leadership literature, but little work has been done to systematically analyze and specifically address the role nonverbal cues play in the enactment of leadership (see this critique also in Remland, 1981; Schyns & Mohr, 2004). Other disciplines, for instance, scholarship of nonverbal communication has a burgeoning line of studies exploring the role of nonverbal communication related to power, dominance, and influence (for a review, see Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005). Burgoon and Dunbar (2006) even argue that nonverbal communication is how people *operationalize* status and power, for example, dominant microbehaviors may affect talk time, loudness, eyebrow raise, posture, threat gestures, proximity, and touch. This line of scholarship, however, provides a limited insight into how exactly nonverbal communication contributes to the achievement of leadership and management goals, for instance, creating trust (Morgan et al., 2014) or communicating in a positive yet assertive manner (cf. Kayworth & Leidner, 2002; Shollen & Brunner, 2016).

Related specifically to leadership, previous studies have explored how nonverbal communication affects the *perception* of leaders. Fernandes, Rouco, and Golovanova

(2015), for example, examined nonverbal cue use of military leaders and found a strong correlation between facial expressions and gestures and perceived leadership, and consequently increased performance. Talley and Temple (2015) speculate that certain hand gestures are particularly effective in creating emotional connection with followers, and could thus be crucial aspects of motivational leadership. Nonverbal communication that reveals emotions, such as animated facial expressions, were also found to be important in the perception of charismatic leadership (Ilies, Cusșeu, Dimotakis, & Spitzmuller, 2012; Shea & Howell, 1999).

Although excellent for drawing attention to the importance of nonverbal communication in leadership contexts, the above studies struggle to capture the subtle and complex meanings achieved by the use of nonverbal cues. Some of the conclusions drawn from approaches that do not account for the communicative functions of nonverbal cues in sufficient empirical detail can, in fact, lead to problematic assumptions when it comes to leadership communication training. Talley and Temple (2015), for example, advocate that it is possible to attach consistent and specific meanings to hand gestures, and so a leader can be “informed of what specific messages he or she is sending” (p. 74). Such advice fails to account for the fact that any element of natural discourse is multifaceted and multifunctional, and may accomplish a range of concurrent communicative tasks: from disclosing emotional and psychological states to maintaining interpersonal relationships and from getting things done to communicating identity and power. Therefore, it is doubtful that such advice and training based on generalizing observations will lead to effectiveness in communication.

With regard to nonverbal communication, apart from their multifaceted role in achieving a variety of communicative goals, it is also crucial to acknowledge the closer and wider contextual factors of the interaction. Remland (1981) argues that “theories are needed so that nonverbal research findings can be applied to organizational environment in a way that takes into account the relevance of key organizational variables” (p. 18), such as the overall organizational culture or the power relation between the people talking. Paying much greater attention to how exactly communication happens in superordinate-subordinate interactions might provide a useful first step toward the development of such theories.

It is such attention to how people interact, fine-grained, immersive analyses that characterizes discursive leadership research. Researchers in this tradition have made observations about nonverbal communication: Holmes and Stubbe (2003), for example, found that while a directive intent can be expressed through a variety linguistic structures, to intensify or attenuate/mitigate the directives leaders increase or decrease their volume, use contrastive stress and rising intonation. Humor, along with it laughter, have also been found to play an important role in leadership communication, for example, as a means of reducing tension in critical situations (Kangasharju & Nikko, 2009) as a means to establish solidarity and collegiality (Rogerson-Revell, 2011) or as a means of displaying power and authority (Schnurr, 2009a). Morgan et al. (2014) make a point that nonverbal communication is crucial for the development of trust and group and cohesion—traits known to be associated within higher performing and effective teams.

One reason for the scarcity—or lack of systematicity—in nonverbal communication research in discursive leadership could be the complexity of nonverbal communication cues, both in terms of their production and function. Production ranges from voluntary (e.g., tone of voice) to involuntary (like blushing), strategic to nonstrategic, and encompasses a range of channels related to body (such as face, body, voice, but even clothing) or other circumstances (such as timing, smell, or space). Functions of nonverbal cues are also very complex and often hard to distinguish neatly into well-defined categories, such as complementing verbal messages, managing interactions, defining, and communicating relationship between the participants, or providing an insight into the speaker's emotional and psychological state (see, e.g., Hargie and Dickinson, 2004). As Walker and Aritz (2014) aptly point out, although nonverbal communication is not a consistent area of study in the discursive approach to leadership, “it is essential to the process,” and therefore would warrant a more systematic attention (p. 143). Similarly, Schyns and Mohr (2004) and Byron and Baldrige (2007) also call for a deeper understanding of nonverbal communication in leadership and management communication, the latter emphasizing the need for the development for such understanding in digital contexts.

Previously, I have given an overview of how organizational literature has previously addressed nonverbal communication in digital contexts. In what follows, I briefly present what is necessary to know about nonverbal communication in digital discourse scholarship.

### *Nonverbal Communication in Digital Text-Only Contexts: CMC Cues*

How people “inscribe” audio and visual cues in writing in online interactions has interested researchers from the advent of digital communication (e.g., Carey, 1980; Reid, 1991). As a result of this interest in CMC cues scholarship, there has been a wealth of attempts to categorize, analyze, and describe the creative writing strategies that serve as nonverbal cues in text-based CMC genres (Bieswanger, 2013; Carey, 1980; Darics, 2015a; Haas, Takayoshi, Carr, Hudson, & Pollock, 2011; Riordan & Kreuz, 2010; Tagg, 2016; Thurlow, 2001; Vandergriff, 2013). Studies have repeatedly pointed out the crucial role these creative writing strategies play during interpersonal interactions (see, e.g., Kalman & Gergle, 2010), but there is no unified system along which these strategies are approached. Traditionally, CMC cues have been categorized as those related to spelling (*orthography*) and related to punctuation (*typography*), but their taxonomy and, often even, their individual definitions differ. Nonetheless, based on the review of the above studies, it is possible to propose an inventory of CMC cues that can serve as a guide to identifying nonverbal cues in text-based digital interactions (Table 1).

The proposed inventory makes a distinction between the *micro-level strategies*: These are divided into orthography, defined as linguistic strategies manifested as variations of spelling, and typography, which entails writing strategies related to punctuation or other keyboard symbols. *Discourse-level strategies* relate to techniques used in interaction management, which, in face-to-face interaction, are achieved through nonverbal signaling.



**Table 1.** Inventory of Strategies Used to Replace Nonverbal Communication in Writing.

Micro-level features	
<i>Orthography</i>	
Nonlexical tokens	hm, mm, oh, uh, ah, um, errr, erm, yup, yeah, (plus variations of these)
Interjections and laughter	boo, yuk, phew, oops, woah, awww, aaaa, eugh, hahaha, hehehe, hihi, hee hee
Comic strip sounds	Boing, boom, zzzz, grrrr, argh
Capitalization	All capital letters, lack of/presence of capitalization, unconventional capitalization
Spelling	Vocal spelling to imitate dialectal or casual pronunciation (yeez), nonstandard spelling: letter repetitions (loooong, buttttt)
<i>Typography</i>	
Punctuation	
Conventional use	As opposed to nonconventional (missing)
Repeated punctuation	Repetition, combination (!!!, !!!!)
Ellipsis mark ( . . . )	Various uses
Other keyboard symbols	Brackets, underscores, asterisk, and the combination of these
Emoticons	
:) :-) :-D :-P :'-( etc.	
Discourse strategies	
<i>Utterance chunking</i> as a floor-holding technique	
<i>Chronemic cues</i> are related to time and the timing of the messages.	

However, it is important to note two things. First, that the cues of the inventory serve as prototype rather than example of nonverbal signaling. This is because creative writing strategies are highly variable: Consider for example, Andrew’s nonlexical token *uhhh* (Line 5) or Fabiana’s laughter *ha ha* (Line 8) in Excerpt 1. Both cues could have been spelled differently without changing the sound they are set to evoke. The reason for such variability is that many of the cues in the inventory are so called *eye dialects*—creative writing techniques that draw attention to the pronunciation or auditory features in writing (Haas et al., 2011). Eye dialects have been long known in traditional written genres, and although some level of conventionality exists regarding their spelling, they are still highly variable (Gumperz & Berenz, 1993).

Second, we have to note that similarly to nonverbal communication is spoken interactions, CMC cues cannot be approached on the basis that they have an acontextual, referential meaning. As Heritage (1984) notes, instances of language use cannot be treated universally: If we do so, there will always be danger that the analyst will presume in advance that the cues will “invariably have the same interactional implication wherever and whenever they occur” (p. 299). Schyns and Mohr (2004) also warn communication scholars to always consider interactive processes and contextual variables and not to focus on merely the elements of nonverbal behavior.

Considering that written nonverbal signals are context bound and their signalling function depends on the close and wider contexts of their use, it is not meaningful to treat CMC cues as a list of isolated signs or as generalized codes, but rather a system that is inseparable from and coexistent with the verbal parts of messages.

In the previous sections, we have seen evidence for the crucial role nonverbal communication plays in leadership and management communication, and I have shown the gap in our understanding of how these strategies are translated to text-based digital channels. In light of the above, in this article, I seek to expose the role nonverbal computer-mediated cues play in unequal workplace interactions that take place via IM. Specifically, I aim to understand how those in higher positions communicate their relational and transactional messages by utilizing the available resources in text-only contexts. To answer these questions, I analyze naturally occurring conversations, closely observing how nonverbal cues function during the interaction.

## Methodology

### *Grounded Practical Theory and Interactional Linguistics*

The article adopts the goals of GPT (Craig, 1989; Craig & Tracy, 1995) and pursues them through the application of *interactional linguistics*. GPT views communication as a practical discipline, its main goal being to improve “communicative *praxis* or practical art, through critical study” (Craig, 1989, p. 98). As a metatheory, GPT guides research by posing specific questions about communicative practice: At the technical level, for example, it zooms in on specific communication strategies and techniques to understand their usefulness for practice and reflection. The basic assumption of GPT is that most communicative practices are shaped by interactional dilemmas, namely, that communicators pursue multiple, often conflicting goals concurrently (Tracy, 2014). As we saw previously, this is particularly true for leadership and management discourse, where assertiveness and getting things done have to be constantly balanced with showing consideration for team members and creating a trusting collegial environment.

This article is thus informed by the logic of GPT by setting out to develop an understanding, which is “empirically grounded in a systematic investigation of communication problems and practices,” but importantly helps refine normative models “addressed to ‘ought’ questions about communicative conduct” (Craig & Tracy, 2014, p. 233). To do so, therefore, it is crucial to observe communicative strategies—in the case of this enquiry, CMC cues—in situ, in their context of use as they naturally occur in unequal workplace encounters.

The analytical approach of this investigation falls under the broad label of *interactional linguistics*. Interactional linguistics sets out to describe linguistic structures and meanings, with particular attention to the social actions they serve in naturally occurring interactions (Lindström, 2009). The relationship between linguistic resources, interactional functions, and the resulting social actions are explored from both directions: Either looking at which linguistic resources are used to achieve certain functions or—what is of interest to us for the sake of this study—what interactional functions are

furthered by particular linguistic forms or ways of using them (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2001).

The process of exposing these functions is based on a “radically inductive methodology” which derive from conversation analytic approaches (Lindström, 2009, p. 97). The micro-level, immersive linguistic analysis is based on two crucial premises. The first premise is that it is not possible to study language out of context, “language form and structures must be thought of in a more situated, context-sensitive fashion as actively reproduced and locally adapted to the exigencies of the interaction” (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2001, p. 4). The second premise is that the proof procedure and the validation of the analysis is embedded in the interaction itself: The analysis does not exclusively focus on speaker intentions, but exposes how other participants in the interaction orient toward or respond to the linguistic features under scrutiny (Hakulinen & Selting, 2005). Plainly put, in the analyses, we can observe how conversationalist interpreted each other’s messages, and use these interpretations as evidence for the analytical interpretations.

Notice, for example, in Excerpt 1, how the validation of the communicative efforts becomes clear in the responses:

1. Fabiana | 10:58 | do u know who is taking minute?
2. Andrew | 10:59 | No, normally I think Cailey herself takes the notes.
3. Fabiana | 10:59 | i dun think so... oh oh
4. Fabiana | 10:59 | Mary said she is not the one taking either
5. Andrew | 11:00 | Uhhh...in the past, whenever Cailey didn’t assign responsibility explicitly to someone, she herself was doing the needful.
6. Fabiana | 11:01 | oh..ok

Fabiana and Andrew co-construct information about the person who is going to take minutes (Lines 2-4). Andrew’s suggestion (Line 2) is rejected by Fabiana (Line 3). Andrew is in a difficult position because he has to disagree with Fabiana (her boss) and repeat the original information (as in Line 2). The communicative strategies in his response reveal his efforts to address this tension (Line 5): He uses *Uhhh*, turn-initial pragmatic marker, which in spoken interaction is also typically used to introduce contradicting information and ellipsis marks, which have previously been found to attenuate directness or express deferential politeness (Darics, 2015a). Fabiana’s response in Line 6 is thus the confirmation that the interactional work Andrew invested in mitigating the threat created by his contradiction has paid off: Fabiana’s *oh* in Line 6 is at the turn-initial position and, along with the ellipsis mark (. . .) and *ok*, clearly signal the change in her knowledge and orientation. This function is what Heritage (1984) described as a response to “informings,” an indication of uptake (p. 302).

What is also important to note here is that content-wise, Fabiana’s message (Line 6) would mean exactly the same without the use of CMC cues. However, she

decides to include *oh* and ( . . . ) as a way to indicate her uptake, signal her thinking process and perhaps to disclose her heightened involvement in the interaction. The effect these CMC cues achieve in communicating relational intent is the very focus of this study.

### The Data

The conversations I analyze in this study have been collected in a virtual team working for a global consultancy company with a headquarters in London, United Kingdom. As part of a larger study that looked at nonverbal communication in virtual work (e.g., Darics, 2010), the interactional instances selected here were chosen randomly, but strategically, to represent a variety of colleagues in interactions where there is a difference of at least two levels of hierarchy between the participants and to cover a wide range of cues (as featured in Table 1) in the analysis. I paid special attention to the interactions involving national and regional leads, as these positions involved functions related to both people management and team leadership. Figure 1 provides an overview of the reporting hierarchy in the company.



**Figure 1.** Reporting hierarchy.

Due to confidentiality and nondisclosure reasons, pseudonyms are used and shorter data extracts are presented as opposed to longer, complete conversations. Overall, the general working atmosphere in this virtual team has been very collegial, and although they work across many national boundaries and hierarchical levels, the style of communication is overall informal and supportive. Further information about the participants that is necessary to the understanding of the individual abstracts are given below. The geographical locality of the people involved in the interaction is revealed; however, these do not necessarily correlate with the cultural and national background of the participant.

## Analysis

### *Relationally Oriented Strategies*

In Excerpt 1, we have seen a range of CMC cues in action: lack of capitalization (Lines 1 and 3), vocal spelling (Line 3), ellipsis (Lines 3, 5, 6, and 8), nonlexical tokens (Lines 3, 5, and 6), laughter and emoticon (Line 8), and specifically regarding the language use of the boss, I have raised the question about whether they play a role in the effective communication of relational and transactional goals. What is clear from the excerpt above is that most of the cues used by Fabiana are not crucial to convey the strictly content-related meaning of her messages, for example, the agreements in Lines 6 and 8. Her contextualization of her message to signal greater emotional involvement, the signaling of her thinking process, and uptake of information as well as the informality communicated through laughter and emoticons create an impression of positive cordial communication. As such, this exemplifies what Remland (1981) calls “considerate leadership behaviour,” that is, “behaviour that communicates high esteem or regard for subordinates by reducing the status discrepancy they perceive between themselves and their superior” (p. 20).

Previously, we have discussed the importance of a positive interaction style being cordial and assertive at the same and creating a trusting collegial environment in the success of virtual collaborations (Brewer, 2015; Hambley et al., 2007; Shollen & Brunner, 2016). The following excerpt shows another example where eye dialect related to sounds and letter repetition are used in an interaction where the boss (Elizabeth) has to give a directive while showing consideration and maintaining a relaxed atmosphere.

Excerpt 2 (Elizabeth, Regional Lead for Europe; Kate, Specialist/the United Kingdom)

1. Kate | 18:36 | hello
2. Kate | 18:36 | just seen the email when do you need it back?
3. Elizabeth | 18:36 | as soon as
4. Elizabeth | 18:36 | y’know
5. Kate | 18:37 | cause i want to look at it tonight and will send back in the morning?
6. Kate | 18:37 | is that OK?
7. Elizabeth | 18:37 | sure sure
8. Kate | 18:37 | OK great
9. Elizabeth | 18:37 | go hooome
10. Elizabeth | 18:37 | ET
11. Kate | 18:37 | LOL

In Line 2, Elizabeth's inferior enquires about the deadline for a report, which is followed by Elizabeth's response in Lines 3 and 4. Her immediate response following the question is a fragment—only an adverb of time that has probably been chosen to communicate the urgency of the task. The seemingly abrupt break after *as soon as* is followed by the pragmatic particle *y'know*. *You know*, in spoken interactions, has been found to help interactants create a kind of camaraderie based on some (hypothetical) shared knowledge, as Östman (1981) attests: The prototypical meaning of *you know* is that the speaker strives toward getting the addressee to accept the propositional content of his or her utterance as mutual background knowledge. This function, combined with the fact it is an eye dialect, provides evidence that Elizabeth was not only trying to “cover up” a potentially threatening message by appealing to a hypothesized shared knowledge but she used spelling that contextualized her utterance as informal, friendly, and nonthreatening. We cannot tell from the excerpt whether Kate has interpreted Elizabeth's Lines 3 and 4 as nonthreatening because the messages displayed in Lines 5 and 6 are not responses to Lines 3 and 4, but are likely to have been constructed and sent concurrently with Lines 3 and 4. However, Kate's final laughter LOL, laughing out loud (Line 11), can be indication that Kate's feelings have not been offended and the colleagues parted on good terms.

Lines 9 and 10 also are of importance to get a deeper insight into how CMC cues can be used to add a further level of informality. In Line 9, Elizabeth orders Kate *to go home* (note the lateness of the time stamp of their interaction!) but she does it by repeating the letter “o”—thus, contextualizing her message as something to be read as informal, playful, or humorous. This intention is confirmed in the next line where she says “ET,” possibly referring to the famous scene of the film of the same title. Kate's laughter (Line 11), as noted above, indicates her uptake of the joking tone.

What this excerpt has shown is that by using pragmatic markers typical of spoken interactions and typography that either invokes the pronunciation of the words or contextualizes messages and informal or playful, Elizabeth used language strategically to put her subordinate at ease, and thus fostering an equalitarian, collegial working environment. This provides further evidence for studies that have shown that informal communicative style leads to the creation of an informal communicative environment, intimacy, and collegiality, consequently enhances efficient communication, and in the case of a work-based virtual team, efficient cooperation (Darics, 2013; Nardi et al., 2000).

Apart from signaling informality and establishing an equalitarian relationship, CMC cues are also crucial to emphasize the level of emotional involvement. This is important because emotions and emotional intelligence have gained an important status among the factors playing a role in effective leadership (see, e.g., Humphrey, 2008). The displays of emotion have been found to contribute to a wide range of goals, from the creation of trust, managing interpersonal relationships, creating favorable impressions and even as a tool to influence team members (Ilies et al., 2012; Wendelin & Weibler, 2006). In face-to-face interactions, emotions predominantly are expressed via nonverbal channels. It is not surprising, therefore, that superiors in the analyzed data set used wide variety of strategies by the means of which they tried to inscribe emotions into writing. In Excerpt 3, for example, colleagues are discussing an issue which clearly causes frustration for both participants (Lines 2-7).

Excerpt 3 (Kaithlin, National Lead/Europe; Jones, Specialist/Africa)

1. Kaithlin | 15:19 | can you download a CL?
2. Jones | 15:19 | yes, just loaded now, but its very slow
3. Jones | 15:19 | still trying to pull a CL
4. Kaithlin | 15:20 | OK
5. Jones | 15:21 | still going.....
6. Kaithlin | 15:21 | cause I just get an error message
7. Jones | 15:21 | yea - i get the same thing
8. Kaithlin | 15:21 | OK
9. Kaithlin | 15:21 | thanks for checking
10. Jones | 15:21 | OK
11. Kaithlin | 15:21 | grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
12. Jones | 15:21 | i know.....

In the closing section of the conversation, Kaithlin uses a comic-strip sound in Line 11 to express her emotional state and Jones affirms his understanding of this function in Line 12. Comic-strip sounds are the visual representation of interjections in spoken interactions. Wierzbicka (1992) notes that in spoken interactions these sounds are not necessarily addressed to a listener, but serve as an act of “doing” to disclose the emotional state of the speaker (p. 163). This observation, however, is not be fully translatable to written interactions because if a message is sent to a conversational partner, there must be some element of addressivity. It is true that the usage of this—and similar comic-strip tokens—does not necessarily need to elicit a response from the addressee, but nonetheless, they play a crucial role: They are textual representation of emotions, feelings, or mental state and help communicators inscribe affect into written conversations. This behavior is an important resource that helps leaders enhance solidarity and create a sense of belonging, which, as pointed out by Schnurr (2009b), apart from “advancing primarily relational aims ultimately also has positive effects on transactional goals” (p. 59).

### *Transactionally Oriented Strategies*

Explicit and direct directives are not unsurprising in interactions where speakers hold a higher position and the action they require from their subordinates are a routine part of his job (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). In spite of this situational affordance, however, leaders often show great consideration for their team members by using strategies that mitigate the force of their messages. This functions clearly combines relational work with transactional goals as in the following example.

## Excerpt 4 (Cailey, Regional Lead/Singapore; Andrew, Specialist/India)

1. Cailey | 09:54 am | just sent
2. Andrew | 09:54 am | thanks, will send the deck with the sample sheet back to you before the call starts.
3. Cailey | 09:54 am | erm...when you are done, can you send out entire thing to all LETs please?
4. Andrew | 09:55 am | no problem, will do that.

In Excerpt 4, Cailey and Andrew are discussing a document, which Cailey has just sent (Line 1) to Andrew. Andrew in Line 2 confirms his next step in the work process. In the following line, Cailey needs to explicitly direct Andrew to an additional task, but instead of just spelling it out, she uses a nonlexical token *erm* along with the ellipsis mark (Line 3). The nonlexical token *erm* is interesting because in spoken interactions these tokens are predominantly used to fill pauses. Because speech is produced without an option for prior planning or editing, we use different sounds to fill the gaps that result from the on-the-go planning process. This is naturally not the case for IM: interactants have the option of carefully constructing, rereading, and editing their messages before sending them off. In this sense, in IM, no real gaps can occur due to hesitation; consequently, the devices that are used to fill pauses in spoken interactions must have additional interactional functions in IM. In this interaction, for example, the written pause filler combined with ellipsis (. . .) works like a device to reflect internal processes, for instance ongoing cognitive activities and the introduction of dispreferred information (cf. Goldman-Eisler, 1961). The mitigating force of the token used by Cailey is best understood if we remove it from the interaction; without this subtle signaling function, the topic change would be too sudden and the request might seem too direct, perhaps an effect Cailey wants to avoid.

Of course, CMC cues are not exclusively used to mitigate transactional goals: They can make communication more explicit and direct as in the following example.

## Excerpt 5 (Elizabeth, Regional Lead/Europe; Kaithlin, National Lead/Europe)

1. Kaithlin | 16:44 | OK i am a bad bad person who does not know how to write objectives
2. Kaithlin | 16:44 | so i am going to write something now OK
3. Kaithlin | 16:45 | for me this is like going to the dentist
4. Elizabeth | 16:46 | you're the LAST
5. Elizabeth | 16:46 | even Samia has done hers
6. Elizabeth | 16:46 | just pick a max of two items per category
7. Elizabeth | 16:46 | no more



8. Kaithlin | 16:46 | OK
9. Elizabeth | 16:46 | and just write a shrot description of what you're going to do, to do it
10. Kaithlin | 16:48 | OK i will try

In Excerpt 5, the hierarchical difference between the two interactants is only one level: Kaithlin reports to Elizabeth but both colleagues hold leadership roles with high levels of responsibility. In the conversation, Kaithlin is talking about a report she had not yet submitted. The conversation begins in a light-hearted tone: It includes a self-accusation, while the content of the message and the repetition of *bad* in Line 1 suggest that the confession is meant to be humorous to mitigate the impact of self-criticism (e.g., Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). In her response, Elizabeth uses capital letters to emphasize the word LAST (Line 4). Although this conversation and their previous IM history suggest that the relationship between the two interactants is friendly, this is an unmitigated reminder or criticism: The content of the message is further boosted by the capitalization of the word “last.” Elizabeth continues her message for another three lines, and only in Line 6 does she use a hedging device: *just*. Elizabeth’s use of capital letters can be interpreted as a strategy to signal that the issue at stake is not something to be joked about, and this message has indeed been understood by Kaithlin, who repeatedly agrees to take further action (Lines 8 and 10). The stress evoked by the orthography is strategically used by Elizabeth to express her serious intent. The unmitigated nature of the declarative created by the means of capitalization also functions as a signal of her superior position in which she has the right to give orders or reprimand for not finishing a task on time. This excerpt thus provides evidence that the manipulation of capital letters is a technique not only to contextualize the intended message in terms of its importance or seriousness but also negotiation of power differences in the workplace—a means to reinforce superior hierarchical position.

Another nonverbal means to signal ones superior position is *utterance chunking*, which means breaking up single utterances into several shorter components and sending them successively, rather than as a whole. Apart from its function to create coherence in interaction (Markman, 2015), utterance chunking can also serve as a tool to “hold the floor” in a conversation, thus preventing conversational partners to contribute, but instead, forcing them to wait until their superior has finished talking. This type of behavior supports Remland’s (1981) argument, who says that the implicit norms of an organization allow higher status persons to act in ways that control the time of others. We can observe this in action in the following interaction.

Excerpt 6 (George, Regional Lead/ Europe; Andrew, Specialist/India)

1. Andrew | 04:35 | Sorry, forgot about your request amidst a spurt of work that came in . . .
2. George | 04:35 pm | k

3. Andrew | 04:35 pm | should I call you or can we ping this one?
4. George | 04:35 pm | would like to call but on another call
5. Andrew | 04:36 pm | I'll wait till you're done.
6. George | 04:37 pm | k
7. George | 04:37 pm | I think we need another sheet
8. George | 04:37 pm | one that the regions can consolidate there sheets into a sum
9. George | 04:38 pm | before pasting the numbers into the global view
10. George | 04:38 pm | i will explain
11. George | 04:38 pm | after this call
12. Andrew | 04:38 pm | okay.
13. George | 04:38 pm | also need all the sheets in separate files
14. George | 04:38 pm | the new sheet
15. George | 04:39 pm | needs to be structured as the others
16. George | 04:39 pm | and have say 20 columns for each cluster country
17. George | 04:39 pm | blank titles at the top
18. George | 04:39 pm | and then a total col
19. George | 04:39 pm | which adds the days up across the 20 or so cols
20. George | 04:39 pm | that way we can take the cpatuer sheet copy it 20 times
21. George | 04:39 pm | when they get it back they can paste the figures into this new sheet
22. George | 04:40 pm | it calcs the total
23. George | 04:40 pm | and then that gets pasted into the global view
24. George | 04:40 pm | make sense
25. George | 04:40 pm | key think for the sheets is that we can copy paste the cols
26. George | 04:40 pm | so the spacing and formating needs to be the same
27. Andrew | 04:41 pm | I think I follow, let me start some work...

In Excerpt 6, we join a conversation between a Regional lead and a Specialist. The discussion starts by Andrew's apology for not sending on a document (Line 1) and his

offer to call or IM about the issue (Line 3). Of interest to us is George's communicative practice: first, his use of "k" instead of OK (Lines 2 and 6). It is a long known fact that spelling mistakes and typos in digital writing create unfavorable impressions of the writer (Darics, 2015b), but the repeated omission of the letter "o" (along with other typos in Lines 20, 25, and 26) demonstrates George's disregard for this. This behavior might be an example of what Remland (1981) calls "display of status": An action that symbolizes one individual's power (p. 20). George's high status allows him to disregard the concerns for correct spelling, and by blatantly saving on typing effort and editing his behavior reinforces the assumed cultural notion that his time is more valuable than Andrew's. Closely related to the control of time is George's utterance chunking: In spite of his declaration of his unavailability on another call (Line 4) he goes on to type for 4 minutes, with his messages coming in very quick succession after each other—only interrupted by Andrew's backchannel confirmation (Line 12). The high typing speed combined with the utterance chunking and the apparent lack of consideration for Andrew's input is an example of what Walker and Aritz (2014) call directive leadership, and provides evidence that person of a higher status is allowed to control the conversation and hold the floor longer (Remland, 1981).

## Summary and Conclusion

I have started this article by taking stock of the fragmented research addressing the problems arising from the lack of auditory-visual signals in digital writing, and specifically how this affects business interactions characterized by unequal power. I have drawn attention to the dismissive tone of business and management scholarship and communication training related to nonverbal language in digital business writing, and the lack of empirical research addressing what actually happens when people communicate online at work. To have a deeper understanding of why digitally mediated leadership and management communication warrants special attention, I have reviewed what is known about nonverbal communication and leadership, making a note of the dangers of approaching nonverbal cues as isolated, acontextual signs. As the result of the review, I have arrived to the conclusion summarized by Schyns and Mohr (2004):

The sending and decoding of non-verbal behaviour has been described as an important element in leadership interaction. The processes that explain how these cues have an effect on leadership outcomes have simply not yet been analysed. . . . Consequently, no simple recipe for leadership practice can be given. Concentrating on some elements of nonverbal behaviour without taking into account the contextual variables seems a risky enterprise. (p. 301)

Building on the understanding of how important nonverbal communication is in leadership and management communication, I have shown that in the digital realm, the ability to convey subtle nonverbal cues is equally—if not more—important. This is because virtual collaborations can only successfully function if the leader is able to resolve miscommunication, adopt a positive interactional style, and

facilitate a supportive working environment (see Berry, 2011; Ejiwale, 2012; Fay & Kline, 2011; Hambley et al., 2007; Kayworth & Leidner, 2002; Shollen & Brunner, 2016).

In light of the need for a deeper understanding of the role nonverbal computer-mediated cues in digital leadership and management communication, and considering the fact that CMC cues cannot be examined out of context, and in a way so that the same cues accomplish invariably the same function in every communicative situation, I conducted micro-level, immersive analysis of selected naturally occurring interactional data. Influenced by the aims of GPT, I followed the “radically inductive methodology” of interactional linguistics (Lindström, 2009).

The analyses have shown that CMC cues accomplish considerable interactional work. The examples provided evidence that the functions achieved by audio and visual nonverbal communication in face-to-face interactions can be recreated through orthographic and typographic means in a written environment. Unlike nonverbal cues in speech, however, they are always used voluntarily, reformulated creatively from and drawing on the experiences of speakers from previous communicative situations in spoken or written interactions. The purposeful use of nonverbal signaling to contextualize relational intent included, for example, strategies to encode emotions and informality, to evoke sound effects or to represent the thinking process. Cues playing a role in contextualizing transactional aims were used to emphasize, clarify or disambiguate meaning and intentions, and to communicate hierarchical status.

However, the analyses presented in this study have limitations. Apart from the hierarchical positions of the participants, no other contextual and ethnographic factors were taken into consideration. Time spent at the company, education background, IM history in general, and communication history between the participants as well as gender, age, and personal and leadership communication style might all have affected nonverbal cue use. One notable example of such effect is the pattern observed across the interactions including one of the highest ranking male Regional Leads: When talking to other males, his nonverbal cue use has been extremely limited, but when talking to female colleagues he did, in fact, use a wider range of cues to achieve a less direct communication style. Clearly, the consideration of individual and other contextual factors in digital leadership communication warrants further scholarly attention.

Since the analyses scrutinized particular instances of interaction, large scale generalizations about nonverbal communication in digital leadership and management communication are not possible based on this study alone. The findings might serve as a basis for further studies: either complemented by quantification to show patterns of CMC cue use across larger data sets or as a basis for comparative studies that could explore the effectiveness of CMC cues in influencing perceptions or during the achievement of leadership goals.

The exposure of the crucial interactional work nonverbal cues achieve in these specific conversations provided an important first step toward reconceptualizing our understanding about digital communication in professional contexts. The subtle, but nevertheless crucial functions point in the direction that digital writing strategies

should be taken more seriously, and viewed as an organic part of digital writing: especially in high stakes encounters such as virtual leadership (cf. Loggia & Bower, 2016). As early as in 1991, when talking about nonverbal cues in online chatting Reid (1991) has pointed out:

Successful communication within IRC [Internet real chat—an early version of IM] depends on the use of such conventions as verbalised action and the use of emoticons. Personal success on IRC, then, depends on user's ability to manipulate these tools.

This observation has a crucial message both for research and training. For research, it calls for a better understanding of how exactly communication happens in online environments, and a greater critique of theories still often used in management and organizational literature that label digital writing as “cues-filtered-out” (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986) and view written nonverbal cues as low-quality, time-consuming substitutes (Thompson & Coovert, 2003). A better understanding of communication practices will also contribute e-leadership theories: Schnurr (in press) points out that micro-level explorations, such as the one presented in this article, are not only relevant to leadership researchers across disciplines but help addressing issues current leadership research is engaged with. One such example is Hambley et al.'s (2007) ethnographic study that admittedly struggles to account for the comments of virtual leaders related to the importance of “reading body language” in digital contexts (p. 56). The present study might serve as a first step in providing empirical evidence for such theorizations.

For management and communication training, Reid's comment highlights the point that prescriptive regulations will not make better communicators. I have shown above the problems that arise in business communication teaching and training if teaching materials are not based on empirical evidence, but rather put forward “conventional wisdom” as a norm that regulates professional communicative encounters. As Mautner (2016) aptly points out,

given the sweeping claims often made by such offerings, easy recipes and quick fixes are, by their very nature, ill-suited to deal with the ever changing complexity that contemporary organisational life throws at the manager. Finely-honed analytical tools, by contrast, coupled with critical awareness, promise a deeper insight and more sustainable problem-solving. (p. 4)

In this study, I have argued that future digital leaders have to develop such critical awareness of the range of linguistic and semiotic resources available to them (as also advocated by Musson & Cohen, 1999). Clearly, to display their authority and power, to avoid miscommunication and negotiate work-related goals while facilitating a good working relationship, fostering the development of team identity and sharing the vision and mission of the team, virtual team leaders must be able to use language and communicate skillfully, otherwise they can negatively affect the effectiveness of the virtual work.

**Table 2.** Comparison of the Original Interaction With a Manipulated Version.

Original interaction	Manipulated version
(1) Fabiana   10:58   do u know who is taking minute?	(1) Fabiana   10:58   do u know who is taking minute?
(2) Andrew   10:59   No, normally I think Cailey herself takes the notes.	(2) Andrew   10:59   No, normally I think Cailey herself takes the notes.
(3) Fabiana   10:59   i dun think so . . . oh oh	(3) Fabiana   10:59   I don't think so.
(4) Fabiana   10:59   Mary said she is not the one taking either	(4) Fabiana   10:59   Mary said she is not the one taking either

To learn to use linguistic and nonverbal strategies and, consequently, to communicate skillfully online, students and professionals should develop analytical skills, instead of acquiring general strategies and formulae. To do this, first, they are encouraged to develop a “conscious, *noticing* communication practice . . . that goes beyond habit, routine, trial and error and . . . popular guidelines that lack scientific grounding” (Darics, 2015b, p. 99). As a starting point, learners should be exposed to authentic interactions—like the ones discussed in this paper—and encouraged to notice the role and function of linguistic, nonverbal, and discourse strategies. As a second step, aspiring communicators should be encouraged to manipulate some of the linguistic strategies identified in the interaction, and reflect on how the changes affect their own interpretation. For instance, a comparison of the original versions of the opening extract (Excerpt 1) with a manipulated version (Table 2) exposes the interactional work the various cues achieve in Line 3. This exposure can, consequently, lead to the realization of the possible communicative functions of both verbal and nonverbal strategies (for further details on this method, see Darics, 2015a).

Finally, learners should experiment with similar strategies in different contexts or new forms in similar contexts, and reflect on how their language and nonverbal cue use affects the transactional and relational outcomes of the interaction.

Following this method, and more generally, the idea of learning analytical skills rather than decontextualized communication practices allows both educators as well as students, trainees, and professionals to flexibly respond to the needs of their own workplace interactions (see also Marra, 2013).

We have seen throughout this study that effective communication is particularly important in management and leadership—and even more so in digitally mediated communication contexts. As Berry (2011, p. 202) notes, “the effectiveness of . . . virtual teamwork is dependent on the resolution of miscommunication and conflict, the development of adequate and competent roles within the team for working together, and facilitating good communication between team members.” This study has shown that an insight into how exactly communication happens in real-life situations and the appreciation of the complexity of digital writing can provide a useful starting point to achieve this goal.

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